

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DRAFTED ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO MIGRATORY BIRD TREATIES

Public comment is being sought on a draft environmental assessment by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of proposed amendments to the migratory bird treaties with Canada, Mexico, and Japan. The assessment describes the environmental effects of amending the treaties to allow spring and summer subsistence hunting of migratory birds in Alaska and Canada, and other alternatives for managing subsistence harvest of these resources.

Hunting of most migratory birds in spring and summer has been banned since 1918 by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which implemented the bilateral agreement with Canada. The ban was imposed to protect the birds during nesting season, but at the time inadequate consideration was given to subsistence needs. Migratory birds, chiefly waterfowl, have long been an important food source for many residents in remote northern areas, particularly in spring when the birds are the first fresh meat available after a long winter. Because of the treaty language, residents of rural Alaska and Canada who follow a subsistence lifestyle have found themselves in violation of the law.

A 1976 treaty with the Soviet Union gives greater recognition to subsistence needs. It provides that the United States may set seasons to allow native and non-native Alaska residents to take migratory birds for their own nutritional and other essential needs. U.S. authorities must determine what those needs are and, in setting seasons, must assure that healthy migratory bird population levels are maintained.

The treaties with Canada, Mexico, and Japan each have different provisions about subsistence hunting and all are more restrictive than the Soviet treaty. These disparities have made it impossible to develop a sound conservation program that adequately provides for subsistence needs.

The Interior agency is proposing to correct the disparities by amending the treaties with Canada, Mexico, and Japan to conform with the subsistence language of the Soviet treaty. It is expected that these proposed amendments will not increase the take by subsistence hunting in either Alaska or Canada beyond the level that already is occurring. Subsistence hunting now accounts for about five percent of the migratory bird take in North America.

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The environmental assessment also examines two alternatives: no change in the treaties; and strict enforcement of the present ban on spring and summer subsistence hunting.

Public comments must be received by May 12, 1980, and should be sent to the Alaska Area Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503. Copies of the assessment may be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (MBMO), Washington, D.C. 20240 (telephone 202/254-3207); and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (MBPC), 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503 (telephone 907/276-3700).

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